

BOSTON LITERARY NOTES.

HAMERTON'S NEW BOOK.

"THE SYLVAN YEAR: THE NOTE-BOOK OF RAGU DUBOIS." BY PHILIP GILBERT HAMERTON—A STUDY OF NATURE—THEORIES ABOUT ART-ETCHINGS.

FROM A REGULAR CORRESPONDENT OF THE TRIBUNE.

BOSTON, NOV. 25.—With every successive book by Philip Gilbert Hamerton, his American audience becomes larger and more appreciative. His "Intellectual Life" has been one of the best read, and most often quoted books of the last two years, and the quiet charm of his style has won its way to a more cordial appreciation than almost any latter-day English essayist has received among us. The public will be glad to hear that Roberts Brothers have nearly ready a holiday book by Mr. Hamerton, entitled "The Sylvan Year: The Note-book of Ragu Dubois." This volume is illustrated with 20 etchings by the author and other artists. Every accessory of fine paper, clear print, and dainty cover goes to make this issue one of the daintiest of the season; and the letter-press is quite worthy of the honor it thus receives. The thread of story is very slender—just a mere vehicle for the thoughts and fancies and suggestions with which the pages are crowded. Ragu Dubois, who is ostensibly the story-teller, has lost in the Franco-Prussian war all his family except one son, Alexis. Spent with grief, the father longs for the healing influences of nature—for a sylvan solitude shared by this boy, who is all he has left to love. So he goes to an old family estate—the Sol de Vente—on a slope in the heart of the forests between the vineyards of Burgundy and the course of the River Loire. There were about 400 acres of woodland on the estate, and the house stood some seven miles from the nearest public road. It consisted of the remains of a monastic establishment, not, indeed, extensive or splendid, but bequeathing to the place the influence of a quiet, religious feeling in harmony with the surrounding seclusion.

In this sheltered home Ragu and his boy passed their "Sylvan Year." The record of daily experience, of rostral communion with nature, and close observation of her moods, is a quiet tale, indeed, but one full of a singular charm. The lesson of peace was not, for Dubois, one of forgetfulness. As he says, "Why should we endeavor to forget? Do we not the dead when we dismiss their memory as too disturbing and importunate?" But he resolved to be always busy, since employment, which is necessary to us all, is to none so necessary as to those who have to bear some poignant and constantly recurring sorrow. He determined to devote one year to bequeathing with his boy, and an instruction which should be as much finer and more complete than that of the schools, as a father's love is warmer than a teacher's duty. Dubois accordingly arranged a programme which it would require the utmost industry to carry out. Besides reading with his son, they were to collect an herbarium, to include the entire flora of this great woodland property, and to make a number of etchings which should illustrate everything of interest on the estate. The book comprises the account of this year of daily wanderings in search of beauty. To artists it will be invaluable, for it will educate them in the habit of minute observation. No writer so detects the changing expressions, as well as the features, of Nature, as does H. Watson. He knows the color of every twig and leaf, every bit of moss or lichen, the formation of every rock. No light or shade on the face of the day escapes his anointed vision—he sees the soul of things as well as the surface; and he has the rare art to inspire others for the time being with the gift of his own clairvoyance.

One of Hamerton's art theories is that nature should not be copied, but idealized. He says that the coloring of nature is not always good or available for art, any more than all the plants for food; and it is one of the first results of culture in an artist, when he is able to perceive this. It is mere fanaticism to speak of the fortuitous arrangements of color which occur in natural scenery as examples of divine art which it is impious to criticize. The truth is that artistic color is as far removed from natural color as artistic composition is from natural composition, and it will be found on investigation impossible to produce that color by simply copying nature. Art finds materials in nature, but she has to choose them, as we choose mushrooms for the table; and if she be not careful in her selection it is at her own great peril. Summer, and not Spring, Mr. Hamerton thinks, is the landscape painter's time of harmony.

Late summer, when the peasants go to the harvest-fields, and come home with songs in the warm-toed, mellow sunlight, the trees have had time to assume the fulness of their foliage. Yet, he adds:

Spring has its own charms, especially for young people, who have it within their breasts. I think, perhaps, as we get older and are saddened by the gloomy experiences of life, that the red and yellow autumnal tints increase our cheerfulness very much. We know too well the limits of a year, how short a space it is, how little it will be satisfactory afterward to be done with it. If we could have a year to do what we like, how far it would bind us, and how we lost them in vain pleasures of profitless labor that seem to us still more vain. Spring is much rather the season of poets than of philosophers. What distinguishes Spring is a move toward actual reality. There is something in the softness of the air, in the lengthening of the days, that warms and caresses, as after a long winter. When the sun comes, the birds should love the Spring, which comes to them with a thousand flowers, with the songs of birds, with purer, brighter light, and such refreshment that it is like a fountain of *joyce*.

I have no time to dwell on the exquisite touches which portray, in this volume, the changing aspects of the sylvan year. There is so delicate a play about the heart of February, which is so delicate that I cannot pass by—that hour-frost which needs for its perfection—

A calm so perfect that a ship with all her sails would sleep motionless upon the surface of the water, and, up to the last, whose tiny particles or hollow spheres, or whatever in their infinite littleness they may be, may fall and settle slowly in the stillness of the night, and freeze and fasten on the timid point tiny toads, to one in a dark winter, and to another in a bright summer, to the completion—but when the time is come, and the fairies are permitted to do their work without any disturbance from the great, strong gods of the temper, or the rays of far-heating Apollo, then a strange and sudden change comes over the earth, and a fragile beauty clothes it, so fragile that the alighting of a bird will shatter it, or the wind from his rapid wings.

The twenty etchings in this volume are extremely beautiful. Eight of them are by Hamerton himself, the others by Greux, Lenepveu, Leleux, and Massard. Most of the pictures are choice bits of landscape; but there is a peasant girl, by Greux, which is very striking. She sits in a haycock-field—there are reapers in the background; but she has sat down among her sheaves, her head resting on her idle hand, and some unexplained despair brooding in her dusky eyes.

L. C. M.

LITERARY NOTES.

Messrs. Geo. P. Putnam's Sons recently introduced into this country in their Advanced Science Series, Thoreau's hand-books of Naval Architecture, and now a class of 64 students has been formed in the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis to study shipbuilding from these books.

Mr. MacGahan, author of "Campaigning on the Oxus," who accompanied Capt. Young in his late Arctic expedition, is preparing an account of the voyage under the title of "The Northern Lights: the Cruise of the Pandion to Peul's Strait in Search of Sir John Franklin's papers."

William Morris's translation of the "Eneids of Virgil," as well as following Virgil's "Binds," he phrases his title, has been published in England, and may soon be expected from English publishers. It is in fourteen volumes, complete, on what is known in the hymns-as-a-class, school books. In speaking of previous English translations, *The Athenaeum* declares that it knows only two, ignoring the most recent, that of Mr. Cranch.

A Wesleyan missionary at Hankow, China, Mr. Wm. Scarborough, has prepared a collection of Chinese proverbs in the original, with translation, furnished with an introduction, notes, and full index, which Messrs. Trübner & Co. announce as a work for which there is a place. The author has translated the Chinese into English, and has given an account of the original, with a number of scattered texts, of which those to be found in Mr. Cranch's Handbook of the Chinese Language are most noteworthy.

There is a "happy family" of writers in the December *Contemporary*: Mr. Gladstone, Cardinal Manning, Sir John Lubbock, Mr. Francis Galton, Mr. Frederic Harrison, Prof. Max Miller, and Mr. Lewesley Davies, Cardinal Manning, and Prof. J. S. Mill, all of whom are to be repaid with full references, the whole making a volume of 200 pages. The memorial of the Board of Trustees asks that Congress will either make an appropriation to pay the expenses of this paper, or Mr. Lewesley Davies's contribution is the first of two articles on Methodist.

The Boston Public Library is about to make a proposal to Congress which will secure to the Government, at the mere cost of printing, a topical index of the United States documents from the XVIIIth Congress to the present time. The index down to 1866 was printed by the City of Boston, and the supplement, brought it down to date, has been printed by the Library. The same documents are to be repaid with full references, the whole making a volume of 200 pages. The memorial of the Board of Trustees asks that Congress will either make an appropriation to pay the expenses of this paper, or Mr. Lewesley Davies's contribution is the first of two articles on Methodist.

Many years ago Prof. Longfellow contemplated making a collection of representative Christmas literature. He gathered much material for such a publication, but did nothing more toward it, until, learning

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that another editor was at work in the same field, he generously placed his gleanings at the service of the latter. Mr. Philip Gates of this city. His book, "Christmas in Song and Story," will be published immediately by Jas. Crockett & Co., in a large red-line quarto, with a hundred illustrations by Foster, Davis, etc., and a price of \$1.00 per volume. It will differ from the present number only after a few pages of the introduction, let us say, of Milton, and these are supplemented by some Christmas sketches in prose, including that "Christmas Carol" without which Christmas itself would now seem incomplete, and pieces by Irving, Bach, and others. "Thackeray's 'The End of the Play'" probably concludes the volume.

A "Student's Manual of English Literature," for use in Roman Catholic colleges, has been prepared by the Rev. O. L. Jenkins, A. M., who has been President of several such institutions, for publication by John Murphy & Co., Baltimore. The author sets forth as his purpose the presentation of "a well-directed text-book, imparting information under an attractive style, and avoiding sectarian views and party interests." To this end, besides the sketches of individual writers, he enters occasionally on general considerations which greatly affect the value of the work. Thus, in periods preceding the Reformation, he takes popular points to show the zeal with which the Catholic Church favored the advancement of letters through monasteries, schools, and universities; and, in addition to the Church, he presents a comprehensive, yet concise discussion on the revival of letters, first demonstrating that the so-called Reformation retarded and impeded the literary movement, and then ascertaining the real cause of the decline of literature in the Church. In the criticism of Protestant writers, the author is frequently obliged to expose their prejudices and errors, but he does it with the calmness and dignity of one who performs a painful duty.

Mr. Theodo. L. De Vime has been editing a valuable work on "The Invention of Printing," of which Messrs. Francis Hart & Co. will publish the first number next month. The work will be published in five parts, of about a hundred pages each, broad octavo, and will be illustrated with 140 engravings, chiefly photo-engraved fac-similes of early types, wood-cuts, statues, portraits and medals, carefully selected from scarce books, or from originals. The work is claimed, is a greater number of illustrations than can be found in any other English book. The work is subtitled as "A Collection of Facts and Opinions Descriptive of the Blockbooks of the Fifteenth Century and the Invention of Printing." It will deal particularly with the development of the mechanical features of early printing, but is intended to give a general history of printing, and a history of the progress of printing in Germany.

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Mr. De Vime is already known as an expert in typographical literature.

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